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SUN BABIES

Thanks are due to the Editor of the "Westminster Gazette" for permission to reproduce *The Gift Princess*, *Kamala Ranjan*, *The Slave of Kali*, *The Suicide*, and *Bhola I*, which appeared in that periodical; and to the Editor of "Indian Ink" for permission to reproduce *Wanglo*.

BOOKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR

BETWEEN THE TWILIGHTS.

Harper and Brothers.

SUN BABIES—FIRST SERIES.

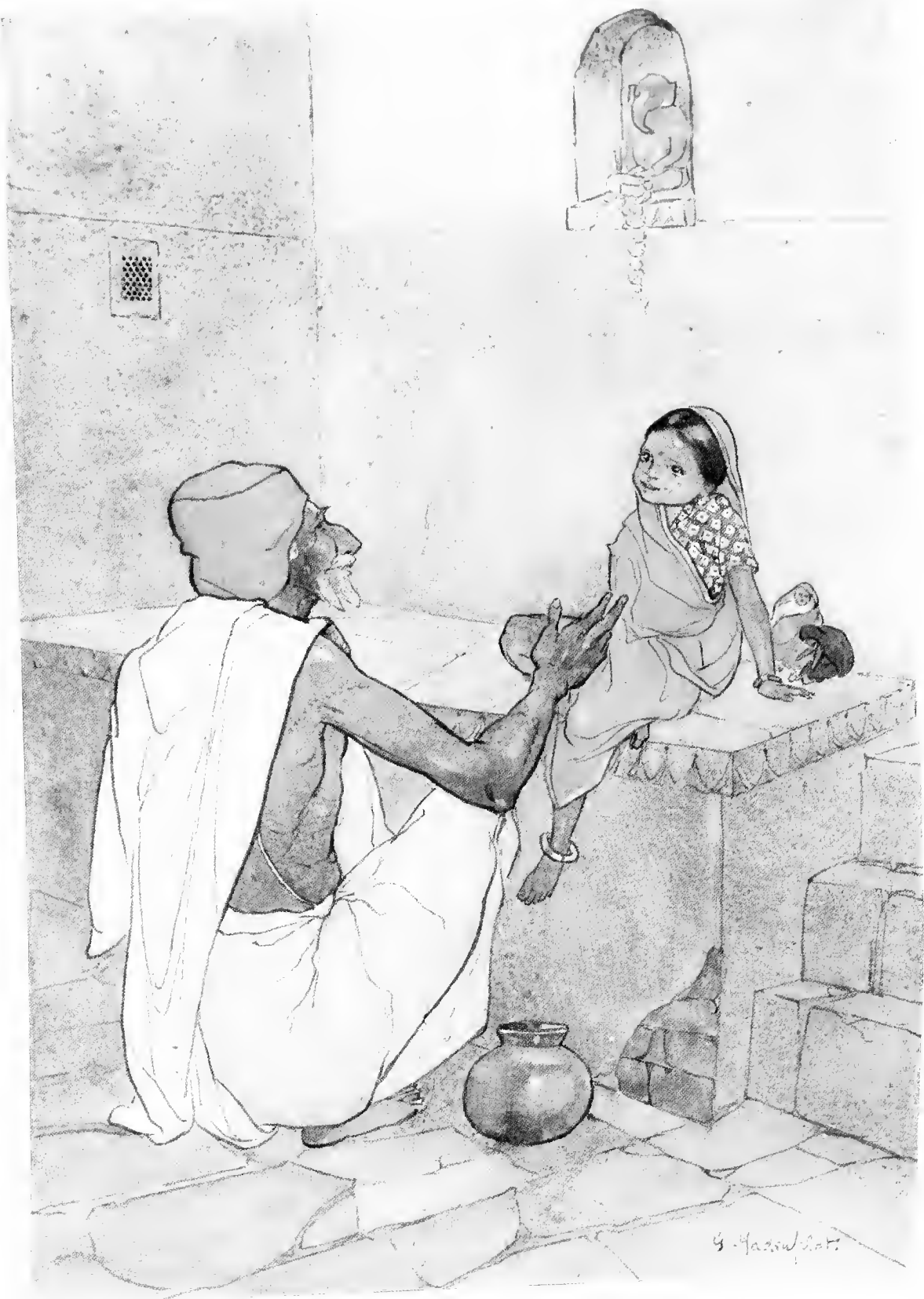
Murray.

INDIAN TALES OF THE GREAT ONES.

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THE PURDAHNASHIN.

Thacker, Spink & Co.



Shubala and the old Priest-man

SUN BABIES

BY

CORNELIA SORABJI



Studies in Colour by G. H.

BLACKIE AND SON LIMITED
LONDON GLASGOW AND BOMBAY

To Geoffrey
Killed in action in France, 26th March, 1918

PREFATORY NOTE

My firstest real baby friend was a Moon-baby. He was English, he was adorable, and I began to know him very soon after the fairies brought him dancing to the Earth on a silver-blue Moon-ray.

A little pensive in repose, his dear face was, when he smiled, the gladness of a spring meadow of golden cowslips.

In my heart I treasure many memories. . . . Geoffrey coming in from his walk with a half-eaten ginger nut which he had saved for his friend: "I brang it all the way for you"; or Geoffrey with a crushed dandelion in a hot little fist, another offering; Geoffrey listening to nursery tales; Geoffrey adoring his mother, like whom, for him, to the end of his days, no one ever existed, or could exist; Geoffrey at five years of age, when on a rare occasion I had to leave the house without bidding him good-bye. That was a beloved nursery memory. When told that I had gone, he would not at first believe. "She did not tell me," he kept insisting. But belief followed on fruitless search, and then: "Come upstars, Nannie," said he to his nurse; and, when up in the nursery, old Nannie was made to cut off a gold-brown curl to wrap away in silver paper against my return.

When I did return: "Bring it, Nannie," he commanded, dancing, as was his way, and hugging himself, and chuckling with joy. And when Nanny "brang" it (his own word), there was the fairy silken curl of my moon-baby friend, lying in the palm of my hand.

"Oh, Geoffrey," I said, "I will take it to India, and keep it always and always."

"And will there," said Geoffrey, "be thinkings of Geoffrey in the Ce-orl?"

.

Geoffrey's gifts to his friends, and his sacrifices for his friends, did not end with nursery days. Somewhere in France he gave all that he had to give—the stored-up gladness of his nineteen years of days, and all the golden promise of the years yet to come.

.

On his undiscovered tomb I lay this sprig of rosemary. He will know, and remember, and understand.

GLOSSARY

Amla, an officer.

Bakhshish, reward, tip.

Bari, house.

Chupkuan, a coat, such as is worn by up-country Hindus and Mohammedans.

Dhobie, washerman.

Dustoor, custom.

Faqir, Holy man.

Khansamah, a house steward: used of a table-servant who can also cook.

Khargosh, a hare; *literally* the ass-eared one.

Khitmatgar, service man: used usually for a table-servant.

Kinkhab, gold brocade.

Mali, a gardener.

Maidan, a plain or common.

Mantras, Sanskrit incantations.

Masalchi, used now of a bottle-washer; *literally* the torch-bearer, or lighter.

Mofussil, the country as opposed to the town.

Puja Ghar, the house of worship.

Sais or *Syce*, a groom.

Takht-posh, wooden four-legs (bedstead).



Maratha girl, high caste,
Bombay Presidency

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Kashmiri girl

SUN BABIES

THE ACCHAWALLAH : A FOREWORD

(See Cover Panel)

The Acchawallah is the son of a Kashmiri boatman. When his picture was painted, he was five years old, and the gravest and happiest of men-children, the world over.

Of ceremonial and the dignity due to great occasions, he brought remembrance with him, surely, from a past existence. His manner was not to be accounted for by five years of this little brown earth alone. He made a Court function of the mere lifting of cushions into a paddle-boat; but, released from this ritual, he was a sprite, a Chenar wood-nymph, a Puck at the cross-roads between the conceptions of Benson and Granville-Barker; more human than a sylvan elf, and more intelligent than a Robin Goodfellow.

Yet—"Goodfellow" is exactly what his name importeth. And he won the name on this wise.

An English visitor to Kashmir was stepping one day into the little paddle-boat which accompanies every house-boat on the Kashmiri river, while this knight of the ceremonies stood at attention, the cushions in their usual place.

"Are you," she wished to say, "a good boy?"

But she used the term *Acchawallah*. "Tum Acchawallah hai?" which, if translation is at all possible, means "are you compounded of

all that which is desirable?" Greatly did this tickle the elf in my knight of the ceremonies. The boat paddled up stream, and he could hold himself in no longer.

"Ham Acchawallah hai," said he, dancing on the bank, running to and fro like a pleased terrier wagging his tail at the prospect of a run after rabbits—"a goodfellow am I, indeed."

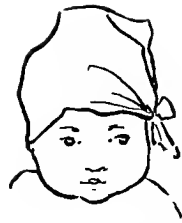
And thereafter every encampment up and down the river knew him for the "Acchawallah".

It was thus that I pre-empted him as my own special aide-de-camp and knight of the ceremonies, to introduce to my friends across the seas some of the Sun-babies who live on the Indian bank of the river of Life.

For never was there a baby, whether child of the Sun or of the Moon, to whom my Acchawallah was not true brother; and never was there a mood, whether born of laughter or of tears, in which at some time or other he was not in sympathy.

So here he is—our common goodfellow—gravely crossing to the English bank of the river, in the paddle-boat built for us by the publisher.

You will let him help you to realize—will you not?—that Acchawallahs are of one family, the world over.



Hindu, Northern India
United Province

THE GIFT PRINCESS

It was the cold weather and the Horse Festival season; and there was plague in Behar. This would ordinarily have been no matter for special precaution; but bazaar rumour weighed with the superstitious. "It was to be a year of death," they said; and the women in the zenanas and the little children in the streets spread the epidemic of fear.

At the corners of the Mohallas about lamp-lighting time, you might see the Purohit Priest-man, double-kneed, at his stool of prayer; fruits were there before him for offering, and roasted gram and parched rice in cups made of the sacred peepul leaf held together with thorns. In the ground he had dug a three-cornered pit as deep as your hand, and here he burnt incense, feeding the flames with melted butter. A book lay open, Sanskrit script, and he chanted, swaying to and fro, and throwing the offerings into the fire as he chanted. The business of the street of shops proceeded as usual—earthenware pipes and betel nut, balls of cotton and food stuffs—I saw claimants for each of these things go away satisfied, doing reverence to the fire and the *Guru* as they passed. And no doubt the women said in their hearts, "Let him live, Let him live," for that loved one who represented the mud-built home round the corner.

Quite regardless of the traffic, in the very middle of the road facing the *Guru* and his fire, sat a group of babies. The girls were in sarees—red, green, orange; and because of the cold their heads were tied into little

cotton wraps, for all the world like Baby Red Riding Hoods, without the frill. The boys wore print shirts and the same kind of gay-coloured wrap. The amulets round neck and arm had multiplied, one could see: and, seeing, realized that prayers for the children had not been forgotten.

The eldest baby in the group seemed about eight years old, the youngest could scarcely have been three. They sat on their haunches huddled together, hands and knees, watching the "puja" and saying never a word.

When a cart rumbled down the road, "Hut!" would shout the kind Pipe-seller; and the babies would scuttle away like rabbits, into drain or shop shelter, returning instantly to assist the *Guru* at his mumblings.

"The Rose Princess", Golab Koer, mothered the children. She was Hindu; but, as with many of the subjects of a some-time Mohammedan Raj, Mohammedan names were common in her family, and so she was called Golab, instead of Dulari or Kishori.

Hers was a loving little mother-heart already, and she was friends with all the neighbourhood.

"*Adab*—my respects to you," she would say to the old men as they passed to their work. "Is it well with you to-day?"

To the women she would lift both hands in blessing, instead of joining them in supplication, as belonged to her years. They laughed at her and loved her for it, "Little Rose Mother!"

Her own parents were long dead, but an

aunt gave her house-room, and here she nursed and petted the children, nor missed receiving what she gave with such real gladness.

You might see her any hour at dusk in charge of more than one little bundle of humanity, sitting in the doorway of her aunt's house-place. Her friends joined her here for the story-telling hour. But when street-prayers began in the Mohulla she decided that to prayers they must go instead, and no one disputed her word.

Sometimes, indeed, the children were allowed to follow the drums beaten in the courtyards of the rich. "But it's 'Ram! Ram!' that you say; nor may you dance or skip," she commanded. "For drums too are prayers, and these drums are to frighten away the Plague Rakshas. If you say 'Ram Ram', he won't catch you as he runs past."

Now the popularity of street-prayers attracted Hira Koer, the sweet-seller's daughter, a great girl, destined for marriage in the spring. And she joined herself to the children. The Rose Baby was delighted; but there was no rivalry of leadership, for none but the Rose Baby would the children have followed. Yet did Hira Koer bring trouble before long, and this was the way of it.

The Rose Baby had one incurable vice. It was kite-flying. She could never resist a paper-bird at the end of a string; for this she would have stolen and fought, and for this she would even have left a baby-bundle crying on a doorstep. That was the worst enormity she knew of, and she confessed that for a paper-kite she would commit this great sin also. Yes, indeed, *and indeed* she would.

Just now there was no need, for Kishore Narain—he whose father made white cotton caps in the next-door house—had made her free of his paper aviary. She was free to play with the disabled kites, and free was she also to watch him practise for the great kite-flying

competition in February. He had a bet on with Gopal Narain, and he meant to win.

So, at the street-praying hour upon a day, it came to pass that the children found themselves deserted of little Rose Mother, and had perforce to fall back on Hira Koer, the betrothed.

"And it is therefore now of necessity that you die of the plague," said Hira Koer to the dissipated Rose Baby, whom she found on the aunt-ly doorstep at bedtime. "You forsook the street-prayers in the Mohulla: you must die. What other road is there?"

"But Kissore and Gopal were having their fight in the air, Hira, how could I come?"

"Phew!" said Hira, no sportswoman; "What of that? It was a sin, you must die."

But at night, as the poor little Rose Baby curled sleepless into her corner, her depression lifted. The aunt and a gossip were talking.

"The Badshah Bahadur, our Maharajah King, comes to Bankipore to-morrow, or next day," they said. "No chance like this for ridding ourselves of sin; yet how shall we slaves get to look upon his face?"

"The face of the king—that is to save me," said the listening Rose Baby to herself in ecstasies. "I will go: without doubt I will go, and I will look upon his face, and then there will be merit and forgiveness for the kite-flying sin."

So the child slept peacefully. Fear slept too.

Early next morning she was off and away at dawn, trudging the five miles distance to the king-seeing place, asking her way as she trudged. No one heeded her; she was only a child of the street, and going, no doubt, on some errand.

She slept that night as near as she could to the river and the Ghat, the landing-stage, where, said they, the king's boat would come, and she was among the earliest to



The Rose-baby had one incurable Vice. It was Kite-flying

greet it next morning. A friendly fisherman hoisted her on to his shoulder, and a policeman pointed out the king, for she had told them her story.

"Tut, Tut, no sin that!" said they, "but look and buy merit for the sins that are to come."

With all her eyes she looked, saying to herself in a tense little whisper of excitement: "Blessings! Oh, King, blessings!"—and then was suddenly afraid, for should she not have used instead the child's word of reverence?

Yet—there was the boat stopping; and the Badshah himself standing on the deck for all to see. Oh! he was not angry; he forgave "blessings" in the mouth of a child.

The fisherman lost her in the crowd, and always mourned to his wife that he had not thought to bring the little thing to their childless home.

As for the Rose Baby, she missed her way back, somehow; and was three whole days before she crept to her aunt's doorstep. She expected a slapping; but it would soon be over. What mattered anything now since she had really seen the face of the king? So occupied was she with her own thoughts that it was some little time before she realized the significance of her aunt's shut door, and the empty street.

The plague had come, said the Municipal Sweeper, and the aunt's baby had died. He

did not know where the aunt had gone. He could tell nothing more. But Hira Koer was to be found in the next street, and to her the Rose Baby hastened forthwith, hearing all details.

"And we thought that the plague had taken you too. For I was right, and you *should* have died for the kite-flying sin. It was indeed the Badshah Bahadur's face-seeing alone which won you forgiveness. You shall not be Golab Koer, the Rose Princess, any more. You shall be *Dan Koer*, the Badshah Bahadur's gift!"

That evening the children's street service had no absentees. I knew, for did not the children scatter before my carriage, and I counted them all. But, when I returned that way an hour later, I waited to watch the end of the Puja.

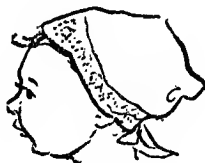
The Gift Princess was no longer silent. She was telling a string of beads; and "*Philil! Philil!*" is what she said.

I asked her what it meant. "She is the Badshah Bahadur's gift," explained Hira Koer; "so she must say the name of the English people's god."

"What is that name, and how did you learn it?"

"Oh! the Dr. Miss Sahib says it to the people at the hospital—'*Philil, Philil.*'"

"It is the plague-time God of the English," the Gift Princess condescended to supplement. "What other name could I take?"



Hindu, Northern India
United Province



Punjabi Boy

KINGA

I saw Kinga first when he was three years old. With other Bhutia babies he played at the gate of the hotel where I stayed in the hills, and as I passed in and out "Talaam Mith Thahib, Baktheeth" said Kinga—all in one word—beaming upon me, a beggar unashamed.

"Wash your face, Kinga! For a clean face there may be pice."

Every day I made the same answer to Kinga's daily greeting; every day on my return, there was Kinga patiently waiting for me, his face shining like burnished brass.

Some three or four years later, there he was again in the old place, but his greeting was different:

"Salaam, Miss Sahib, Work."

"Oho, Kinga! But what work can you do?"

"I will be Miss Sahib's khitmatgar."

"In just a few more years, Kinga."

"No, I will be Miss Sahib's khitmatgar this year. I go down with the Miss Sahib to Calcutta."

And, as if there were no more to be said, he turned and ran down the hill.

After that, every day, Kinga was to be found sitting at the post office on the Four-Roads, lying in wait for a job, singing "Tipperary" or joking with the dandiwallahs and donkey boys.

One proud day he was to be seen carrying the coat of a wounded soldier, and bursting with self-importance.

On the morrow he turned up at my hotel.

"The Miss Sahib sees that I can work. I am a man-child who has hoarded money and eaten his own money. I will be Miss Sahib's khitmatgar."

He looked rather an attractive wee man, and I felt I really should like to take him down as a kind of page-boy.

"But I must ask your father, Kinga. Have you a father?"

"Oh, yes, there is a father to me—a khan-sama: but what need to ask him? I am an earner of wages. I am in my own power. No longer am I in my father's power."

"How much did you earn, Kinga?"

"Four annas," said Kinga, chin in air—as one would say "Four millions".

I insisted on the paternal permission however, and matters were duly arranged.

He was rather an adorable small creature, about seven years old, sturdy-legged, with a round face, a freckled little Bhutan nose and slits of eyes—a Mongolian in type, as he was bound to be—with the merry smile and sunny nature of the Hill folk.

For intelligence I have never seen his equal. He was quick to learn and quick to interpret mood or fact, and quick to apply and reason.

The things he noticed in a street, as the things he remembered, showed how all the time his little mind had been unconsciously selecting and recording just the intrinsic things—doing instinctively what training and experience compel in the rest of us.

I gave him dull-blue clothes, shirts and shorts and a leather belt, which became his active little person perfectly, and I am afraid that he was perhaps therefore rather too attractive, for I live on a public highway, and Kinga made friends with every passer-by.

Moreover he had taken care of himself too long to be content with life under a roof, and with ordered days. It bored him to find his

meals cooked for him by the khitmatgar, who was also of his caste, or even to find a meal at all with regularity. He wanted the gamble of earning it—out in the open—and to my horror he was discovered singing “Tipperary” in the street, and running errands in and out among motors and among horses’ feet, when I was away from home.

The money so earned he spent on cigarettes.

I tried to speak to him about this, but, before I said three words, Kinga spoke to himself: “*Tchu, Tchu!* a boy to whom honour has been done, a man-child earning wages, to go into the street like a boy of the street and take money from people. *Tchu, Tchu!* what talk of shame!”

“Yes, Kinga,” I said, “I’m glad you know that,” and then, as he had told a little lie, I talked to him about that too, I remember, and also about smoking, and the dangers of a Calcutta street for a small boy running among carriage wheels and motors. I forget what I said exactly, but at my dinner hour, when Kinga would come to salute good-night and to take a chocolate up to bed, he appeared penitently behind my chair, and began reciting *sotto voce*:

“*Musn’t* tell lies, *musn’t* smoke, *musn’t* run into the road. Will drop down dead if I smoke or run among the feet of air-carriages. Will drop down dead if I lie. May do anything I like, but must always tell the Miss Sahib. *Must not* tell lies.”

I did not recognize all that as my own, but the essentials were evidently mastered. So I said: “Good talk that you remember, Kinga,” and much to his surprise he carried up his chocolate to bed as usual.

The next night he came to me crestfallen.

“Two things are hard to do.”

“What are they, Kinga?”

“In two things to keep the Miss Sahib’s word it is hard for Kinga. All the rest is easy.”

“Well, Kinga?”

“About smoking and about not wandering. The desire to drink cigarettes comes, Miss Sahib—how shall I say?—comes and holds me, runs after me and holds me. And, whenever the Miss Sahib is out of the house, in the same way comes the desire to wander.”

“Well, run down to me, Kinga, (he lived on the roof) when the desire for smoking comes, and we’ll do work, and the desire will go.”

So down he pattered, next morning—it was a Sunday and I was at home—about 11 o’clock, as if fleeing from pursuit.

“It’s holding me, Miss Sahib, it’s trying to catch me.”

“Very well, Kinga,” and we settled to some Hindi reading and writing. It was his great ambition to be a Hindi scholar, and it was really a joy to teach him, and no trouble, for he would bend over his copy absolutely absorbed.

We would read a sentence and then Kinga would write it. That was the way we managed, so that my own work was not entirely interrupted.

After he had been busy for about twenty minutes, he had to wait a little for me, and remembered his cigarette.

He danced with joy: “Where has that cigarette-thirst gone, Miss Sahib? It’s gone;” and his delight and surprise were really rather beautiful.

He had darling little ways; he would, for instance, salute my mother’s picture in the drawing-room every morning before beginning to dust as the Bearer was teaching him to do. He saluted all the things he revered and all the things he liked. The picture of the wives and mothers of the Parsee priesthood weaving the sacred thread—which a friend had sketched for me, as she passed through the Parsee ecclesiastical town of Western India—was a special favourite, and long would the little “housemaid” linger



The Picture which Kinga liked

before that. One day he was found saluting the sunset, lost in wonder of it and saying: "*koto ramrau, koto ramrau*" (how beautiful), in his Hill language. And he came running to me to say: "Miss Sahib, the colours in Miss Sahib's clothes and in the drowning time of the sun are the same."

What first suggested prayer to him I do not now remember. Perhaps I asked him if he said his prayers: perhaps he himself first spoke of them. But at any rate it was his own idea to ask God to help him to conquer, in "the two words of the Miss Sahib" which he could not keep.

He would go into the box-room about dusk for his Evensong.

It was the time when the servants were in the habit of leaving him in charge of the door-bell.

Letting myself in one evening with my latch-key, I came upon Kinga unseen and unawares, and before I could withdraw had overheard his prayer.

He was standing as straight as a soldier and his little forehead was puckered into earnestness, his hands gesticulating as he spoke:

"Throw them down, O great God, the bad things which rise up and hold my throat and make me want to drink cigarettes and break the word of the Miss Sahib; and that other thing which rises inside me and makes my feet run down and out into the street, breaking the other word of the Miss Sahib. *Little little* things but *big big* things when the Miss Sahib's word is broken."

"Miss Sahib," he said one day, "where does God live?"

"Wherever you find Him, Kinga."

"But, Miss Sahib, that is true talk. I find God in many places in this house. I find Him in the box-room, when I sit down to listen for the door-bell. I find Him in the drowning of the sun; and when the stars are

bright in the dark sky as I go to bed I find Him: but I cannot speak to Him then."

"Why not, Kinga?"

"Because I then have eaten my food, and how should one speak to God with a stale mouth?"

Then thoughtfully, "But, Miss Sahib, in the hills, among my own people, why is it that to find God we must go to the idols in the temple?"

"They have not learnt to look elsewhere for God, Kinga," and my little theologian was content with the answer.

When I was going away to the Districts, Kinga was very sad.

"For how many days shall I not see the Miss Sahib and the Miss Sahib not see me?"

I told him.

Then—"If the things forbidden come to catch me, what shall I do?"

"Come down here and be busy, Kinga."

"But to be busy alone will be talk of difficulty."

"Yes, I know, but try."

"Yes, Miss Sahib."

When I returned from the Districts—

"Been good, Kinga?"

"Ye—s"—doubtfully and a little depressed—"for one day. Then the things caught me, and I could not be busy. I smoked a very little bidi (the Indian cigarette) one day." And then, brightening, "But I put the thing under my foot the next day."

"Did you, Kinga?"

"Yes, because I could not be busy, I found a new way."

"What was that?"

"I said prayers to God; but still the thing caught me. So, as the desire had come up from my throat to my mouth, I took a coal from the cook's fire—and—I *burnt* my mouth."

"Oh Kinga, you must not try that way," I hastened to advise, for there was a little burn

on his lip, and I did not know what further might befall.

"Very well, Miss Sahib. But, Miss Sahib, why are there two boys inside me—a good Kinga and a bad Kinga?"

One of the ways of distraction we found was for him to teach me his Hill language, and he was a most stern and exacting teacher. He insisted on my learning not only the right words, but the proper intonation and the funny little sounds which he made himself "*Tchu Tchu*" came in very often.

"It is not *pahari*-talk if the Miss Sahib forgets *that*," he said.

The servants were not always kind to the boy I found. Possibly because he got so much attention, possibly because he was too much of an anxiety in my absence. So, while in Calcutta, I took him to office, and let him do lessons sitting in a corner of the room. He was, as I have said, an apt scholar. Within fifteen minutes he had both learnt to read and write the first ten numerals, and was doing addition sums.

And always, whatever one taught him, the intelligence of his questions was a joy.

To be allowed to drive with me was much appreciated. "What a day we have had! We have wandered all day—we went to Office, we went to Rajbaris after office; no one roof covered us, many roofs there were, and the sky there was; and we saw the road and the motor-carts, and horses and stone horses (the statues) and many and many people. What a day! What a beautiful day!"

I had to whip Kinga one day, and because it did not hurt I explained about the shame of the thing. I heard him talking to himself about this, "The Miss Sahib's beatings do not hurt, but it is the shame of eating a beating, Kinga—the *shame*."

Of the war his caste-folk had told him in

Darjeeling. "Our own Nepali folk have gone to fight," he said, and was full of joy because I let him cut war pictures out of the papers. He cut them very neatly and pasted them on the walls of his room, and that night he prayed God to make him big quickly, and to grant him some day to climb up and stand on the head of the enemy's rajah with a sword in his hand. He would stamp up and down on the verandah in preparation for that great day, drilling himself, shouting "Pom-poss (form fours), Righttunn, Lefttunn"—and other orders which I could not always interpret.

The tragedy happened soon after this, born no doubt of the spirit of daring into which he had worked himself over thought of the war.

He stood on the very edge of the parapet of our four-storied roof, and called smiling remarks to the passers-by. The servants rescued him, and came to me in a body in great and real terror.

"Miss Sahib goes away again to-morrow. Kinga listens to no one of us-people. Please send him away, Miss Sahib, or his brains will lie on the pavement below."

So, with sadness at my heart, I saw him set forth for his family, very proud of his box and of his new possessions, but wistful too.

"The naughty Kinga inside me is taking me away, Miss Sahib. When he is put under my feet, I will return."

Since I wrote the above, Kinga has been to see me once more. I am hoping to put him in some his-people's school in the hills.

"Yes, I will be good and learn *furti, furti* (quickly)," said Kinga. "But it is true talk that after the hot weather I will be Miss Sahib's servant once more. Because there is sadness in my heart in any other place, the desire for breaking the two words of the Miss Sahib has gone."

KAMALA RANJAN

When first I made his acquaintance, Kamala Ranjan was ten months old. His father had died suddenly, and left him heir to a large zamindari, and there was just this frail little life between direct inheritance and a crowd of undesirable collaterals. So Kamala Ranjan was a personage: and it was necessary to consider how best to preserve his life.

"It will have to be an English nurse," said the grave and reverend senior who was ultimately responsible.

And our troubles began: began also our joys, for did I not have a field-day, shopping, to furnish an entire English nursery under experienced guidance?

Kamala had a mother and a grandmother, both orthodox Hindus of the orthodox, and the big task before me was to reconcile an English nurse with orthodoxy. Well, they should help me. They should choose. And as we sat upon the roof, when the sun was low, and dear old Rani Ma had left her "remembering-of-goodness" (as she styled her prayers), to do me honour, I put the question to her.

"What now is the most important thing in regard to Kamala Ranjan?"

"Oh!" said both Ranis, gentle little mother and beautiful grandmother—their joined hands raised to their foreheads in silent prayer—"His life, his life—to keep that safely."

"Will you do that for me, for us? He belongs to us, too, now; will you promise that he will be safe?"

"No! No! We failed. Did not his father die, and his grandfather, so young, so wastefully young?"

"What, then, is your thought? How shall it be done?" And so we got to talk of nurses; and yes, they might have what nurse they chose, if they would answer for her. But they would not take responsibility, and consented to the English nurse, who, they knew, would be less easily approached than any other.

But my heart was sad for the two women in their bondage to custom. Courteous they were, always and always, to the alien lady, but never did they take the child from her arms, till one of their own caste had washed and re-clothed it.

And I, looking on, smiled, but said nothing; for I knew that there was something more powerful than custom.

And Kamala Ranjan waxed strong and prospered—his limbs grew round and consistent, his lovely large eyes, with the lashes that swept the soft little cheek, lost the shadows of delicacy—regular hours and untiring care were doing their work. Nor could nurse have had her way without the Ranis' help: and, as I came and went about my business, my heart reached out in gratitude to both.

Then, one day—again upon the roof-top—"Let the child come," said Rani Ma; and there, before my eyes, I saw the child passed from English nurse to orthodox Hindu lady straight—no purification ceremony lying between.

"Yes—you did see it: *you did*," said little

Rani turning to me with shining eyes. "Yes—for we, too, like Kamala Ranjan, are learning things. There is no caste in Love. Yes—we watched the nurse, Mem Sahib, night and day: we know: she loves our baby."

Then they gave instances, breathlessly, speaking together—such quaint delicious instances, showing their selfless measure of love, proving the dearness of their own simple natures, so eager to claim the best in all around them. "She loves our baby. There is no caste in Love." And I knew that there would be no going back upon that verdict.

As Kamala Ranjan found feet and language, there was only one place, the nursery, secure from his tyranny. And even the nursery he patronized after his kind. "No doubt I listen there; but that is because it is my own wish to obey in that room of my childhood." And then the women would rock with merri-ment, as he reproduced his nursery rules for the zenana, put his mother or some old waiting-woman in the corner: withheld rewards, for disobedience, &c.

"Oh! He is ripe," they would say; "already is he ripe, a Maharaja Bahadur."

And Kamala Ranjan lorded it over the zenana in three languages, holding his head very high; and his mother and his grandmother and all the waiting-women were daily being educated in all that pertained to the early years of the best-educated baby. All his pretend games did they play with him—such novelty to them—and I do really believe that the grandmother and grand-aunts thrilled more than Kamala Ranjan when he broke among them, the escaped lion from the Zoo. As for their vocabulary, it was now polyglot, like his, for they added English and Hindi words to their native Bengali.

One day, when he was five years old, I got an urgent telegram: "Please come at once, a great difficulty has arisen; it is a matter of life and death, make no delay."

And I flew, fearing measles, and chicken-pox, and every baby-ill I could imagine.

But it was none of all these things. Kamala Ranjan, in the course of one of his displays in the zenana—nursery rhymes, pretend soldiers' drills, games, what not—had actually seized a pencil and drawn before their eyes the picture of a horse, and actually—yes, they saw it—made a sign which was surely an English letter of the alphabet: he had said it was so, and he was very proud of it, *but* his learning had not been blessed. It was a terrible thing to begin to write before the priests had blessed the pen in your hand.

Please would I arrange at once for a "Chalk-in-the-hand" ceremony? Yes, but *at once*; any day would be auspicious which we might choose.

And we made the budget without delay, and Kamala Ranjan was dressed in a little shirt of very fine muslin, and the "black" of good omen was smeared under his eyes (Rani-Ma preparing it herself of burnt coco-nut husk, over her own jewelled lamp-stand), and his little feet were rubbed with red sandal-wood, and the old Amla took him by the hand with much solemnity, and led him to the group of priests sitting in a circle on the floor.

Before them lay a blackboard, and the chief priest had traced two letters of the Bengali alphabet upon this board, in preparation.

Then Kamala Ranjan was blessed in all his ways, and in all learning, and in the writing of his hands, and the reading of his eyes; and the priests put a piece of chalk between his fingers, and together the old, old man and the baby followed the lines of the letters carefully and earnestly—as if all rectitude of soul and brain depended on just how this first great step were taken, this first great task accomplished.

"See!" said the toothless one, "it is perfect; no single line has gone its own way. The omen is good."



"Let the Child come," said Rani Ma

And Kamala Ranjan was released to enter upon all knowledge, and to continue to boast himself before the women-folk in the zenana.

When the King and Queen were in India, he made an announcement: "Till the Badshah People are returned to their country, I wear my sword, night and day, to guard the Queen. How can these women guard her? Am I not the man in this family?"

And he even slept with his little tin sword beside him, clutching it tight.

"At night there is most danger," he said. Nor did it matter that he slept by his sword in his own domains, while the Queen's tent was pitched in Delhi. "I *am* taking care of her," he said.

He had inherited that feeling of nearness which is independent of vision. His mother and grandmother, who never even saw the Royal carriage drive down a street, nevertheless lived all through that time as if themselves at Court. Partly the child drove out and saw, they explained; but it was more than that; if you loved the Badshah People your heart felt all the excitement of everything through which they were passing.

"It is like our love of God. We do not need to see Him to feel Him just here," said Rani-Ma.

Kamala Ranjan was their Majesties' youngest zamindar subject in Bengal, and Kamala Ranjan's property adjoined the battlefield of Plassey. So when Rani-Ma asked me, with a world of desire in her face, if by any chance the child could be blessed by presentation to the Queen, there seemed a fitness about things, and I set about acquainting the proper authorities with her desire. In due course it was allowed. And there was Kamala Ranjan, on the day of the departure from Princeps Ghat, dressed in a magnificent

jewelled dress of Darbar, with a diamond aigrette in his turban and a necklet of emeralds and pearls, and with his toy-sword girt at his side. He was tearful with excitement. He has a darling little stammer, and when we rehearsed his presentation the day before, and he made his salute to me, pretending I was the Queen, I said: "And why do you wear this sword?"—"To—to—to—take care of you," was the answer.

Both their Majesties most graciously greeted Kamala Ranjan on the great day, and it looks now as if his whole life were to be lived in loyal consciousness of that fact. The little toy-sword, which his Majesty touched, was by his own order put into the state Toshakhana (Treasury), as soon as their Majesties had left the country, to be kept safely for always, and though he still longs to wear a little sword, from some baby notion of loyalty he will not. He sighs and says: "That is only for the Queen; when will she come again?"

It was but a few days ago that I last saw Kamala Ranjan. He has been drilled by a Boy Scout, English friend; and it was really quite absolutely delicious to see the zenana calling the words of command in English, as Kamala Ranjan went solemnly, and with his high-purpose look, through all the little ritual of the Order.

"Was there ever such a child?" said the women. "He brings all the wide world inside these walls."

But Kamala Ranjan ran after me to the carriage, and, "I gave the toy post-boy, who runs when you key him up, to Rani-Ma," he said. "She and my mother are women and like toys. But please for me, who am big and a *man*, will you send the book about the man in the moon, and the green-cheese house with bread-and-butter doors?"



Bengali Schoolgirl

THE SLAVE OF KALI

That was his name—the Slave of Kali, Goddess of Destruction: and when you looked at him you were struck by the pitiful inappropriateness of things. He was small and undersized, even for five years old; his bones were almost like jelly, his chest narrow, his limbs so loosely jointed that you were afraid to handle him lest he should slip asunder like the dolls of your youth when the glue got heated in the sun.

The comfort was that he did not take his name seriously, like another slave of Destruction whom I have known. He looked at you with the appeal of the helpless victim, not with the assurance of the Destroyer. Or was one perhaps wrong as to measurements, and do the Destroyer and her messengers make bigger appeals for mercy than can ever arise in the hearts of the merely passive?

I had to turn away from the question, for the circumstances in which I first saw the Slave of Kali were sufficiently engrossing.

The Slave and his mother and grandmother, and a baby cousin of three years old, lived in a remote palace beyond a river-bed, in the rich coal country of Bengal. And one afternoon, in the hottest time of the year, I got a telegram asking me if I could go and see them without delay, for there had been a quarrel in the palace zenana, and already one man, the grandmother's chief mischief-maker, lay dead by a drain against the palace wall. The head of the local police had taken his man's way to stop the quarrel—he had bricked up the door between the ladies' apartments,

and was much surprised when they climbed on to their respective roofs and continued hostilities in shriller accents still, agreeing but in one thing, namely, that the policeman had broken their *Pardah* by his peace-making efforts.

So, said my telegram, "Please come as quickly as you can." And I went, compelled to use a slow coal-coolie train, and being carried in a *palki* (a box borne on men's shoulders), for fifteen miles beyond the railway line, across the river bed, and over hot barren country.

I will not tell you the details of my "peace-making". I did not brick up any more doorways, but the day was spent with the mother of Kalidas, and Kalidas sat on my knee with his pathetic eyes glued to my face. He was a dear wee boy, and we were pledged to help him, because he was the rightful heir to the brick and plaster palace, and the ruins of the little kingdom on the bank of the dry river-bed.

We talked, his mother and I, of the advantages of peace, if custom compelled you to live year in year out under the same roof as your mother-in-law.

The mother-in-law was a merry old lady, with a large variety of tactics for every imaginable intrigue. She did not like her daughter-in-law, so her idea was to disclaim the son of her eldest son—he was bought in the bazaar, he was exchanged for the child of a maid-servant, what not? Any plan would do—in favour of the son of her second son, the three-year-old.

I saw this cousin-child later. He was a charmer, a merry little round-faced dumpling, with a mass of jet-black curls lying soft and insinuating against his shapely head. I fell in love with him straight, the Arch-Pretender, but turned back with a sigh to the Slave-boy; for was he not ours to protect?

"I could forgive her everything," said the Slave-boy's mother — "everything but the bone under the bed."

Here, then, was something tangible. I seized on it at once—on the point, I mean, not upon the bone, which, if it existed, still lay menacing in its secret and portentous position. I had met that curse before. So I said, with the solemnity which the case demanded: "If she has cursed the boy, she has cursed us who guard him. I will see to that. But first we must have your family priest-man here, and I will ask him about the curse; this is 'of necessity' before we go any further."

The priest had only that moment, they said, arrived back from a far journey. That was good (I should get him uninstructed) let him come. The entire zenana awaited him, squatting on their heels. Serving women of all ages, ragged as to clothes, wispy as to hair; the Rani also on the floor, taking furtive pulls at a silver embossed *huqqa* with a long snaky mouth-piece; the Slave of Kali, more-gnome like than ever with the excitement of a real child struggling with the wistfulness in his age-old face; and I sitting in an ancient green and gold carrying-chair, the only bit of furniture in the long quiet room save for the fated four legs which hid that awful secret, and was covered with a great purple Kinkhab coverlet, as it might be the pall of an Emperor. The priest had come. They looked to me to open proceedings: so I said:

"Is a bone under a bed a curse?"

"A bad and powerful curse," said the priest-man.

"But one you could make of no avail?"

"It depends," he said cautiously.

"Yet, to be powerful as a curse the bone must be a particular bone?"

"Without doubt."

"Any bone at all would not do?"

"Ugh! You could not ask it to do."

"Well, then, what bone?"

"A human thigh-bone."

"And if I found another kind of bone under my bed?"

"You could laugh at the curse."

Now came the thrilling moment. All my faith was in that bone. If only it would prove "any bone at all"! For, if the priest had been on a journey, who else could have a cursing-bone handy?

"*Bring out the bone*," I said, my heart in my mouth. He was ridiculously, aggravatingly slow, that old priest-man, and after all his back would not bend enough to let him see under the bed, so the Slave of Kali nipped in, and got the bone.

The women sat unmoved, the Rani barely looked; and I was left all alone with my thrill.

It was a darling, blatant, unmistakable leg-of-mutton bone!

I wanted to laugh and cry at the same moment in the relief of my feelings; but I had to be unmoved, even as the other women, and ask again solemnly:

"And is that the cursing-bone?"

"Bah! Not that!" said the priest, tossing it to the dog below the window, who must himself have left it beneath the bed, poor innocent beast.

So we made friends with the tiresome mother-in-law, and I was able to hug the Arch-Pretender with a clear conscience, and we unbricked the door between the two zenanas. But, being of some experience in the ways of women, I arranged for the factious lady to go on a long pilgrimage, as soon as my restraining presence should be removed.



S. Haden/1927

The unconscious Bridegroom came Home with a Blue-green Parrot in a Gilt Cage

Now life at the brick-and-plaster palace settled to normal once more; and, later on, even included a governess, who taught the Slave of Kali to read Hindi script, and who told him nursery tales, and helped him to write me wonderful picture letters week by week.

We were able also to see that his little body got the care it needed; and the wizened face lost something of its plaintiveness of ill-health.

So all too soon we had travelled to his tenth year, and he was marriageable by the custom of his brick-and-plaster standards. There was more to consider than the matter of obtaining a lady to walk the seven steps round the sacred fire. It was our best chance of retrieving the Slave's fortunes, and the dowry cost his guardians anxious nights and days. "A village with a coal-mine," was our demand, but by some trick of the bride's party, that was just the thing which we could not get. Strings of elephants and camels laden with household-stuff, gold and silver vessels, trumpets and scimitars, palanquins and bedsteads, ear-rings, toe-rings, nose-rings, Kinkhabs, gauzes and silks galore, Kashmiri shawls, turquoises, pearls, and diamonds—these, indeed, we could have; but no coal-mine.

Our advisers sat in council, depressed and defeated. "Is there no last hope?" asked one.

"Just one," said the Oldest Councillor. "At his first meal in the father-in-law's house, may the boy ask what he will. Then, indeed, he may get his village; for to refuse at that moment is unlucky. To the father-in-law that would be worse than a broken promise."

So, to the first meal we all set forward the minute-hand of desire, and the Slave of Kali was taught to say: "I want a village with a coal-mine."

And now the great day was here, and the

boy behaved like the prince he was, with dignity and propriety; and the father-in-law said: "I have got me a Maharaja indeed;" and he took him to his house, and his courtiers and his family and all the waiting women in the zenana, and the cousins, and cousins' cousins made much of him, and called him "Little brother".

And presently came the serving man to say that the wedding meal was ready; and for a space was silence in the great Darbar hall, the while the boy should make his prayer. And upon the silence fell his words, so that all might hear: "*I want a village with a coal-mine.*" The father-in-law was aghast—he was so sure the boy would ask an emerald ring or a ruby necklet, that both these things were already in his hand, and fell to the floor with a flash and a tinkle. He looked round helplessly for his right-hand man, the Dewan prime minister.

If anyone could save the situation, Hari Lal would save it, for sure. The father-in-law had not trusted in vain; for, a wad of betelnut in his cheek, Hari Lal now strolled forward. "The fool man," quoth he, "who spoke of meals in readiness, has lied; the meal is not yet served."

So there was breathing space, and on Hari Lal's initiative all alike began to distract the boy. He was "Maharaj" now, and flattered and cajoled, and some brought one thing and some another for his amusement. At last Hari Lal bethought him of the cage of parrots, red and grey, green and blue and yellow, every variety of parrot bought last winter in Calcutta at the local Jamrach's in the Bird Bazaar. The great cage was carried in, and the Slave of Kali, who had never in his poor little waste-places seen any birds but sober brown Mainas, and the homely sparrow, and the white rice-bird, and the long-tailed king-crow, our poor little Slave of Kali got carried out of himself (what would you? he was only ten,

and it was his baptism into childhood), and turning to the father-in-law, "Give me, Oh! Father-in-law, Great-one," said he, "give me this parrot!"

"The dinner is served," said Hari Lal, smiling in his beard, and the unconscious bridegroom came home at the end of the revels to his tottering palace, with a blue-green parrot in a gilded cage.

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"Great is the deceitfulness of riches," said the Oldest Councillor, as he watched the re-

turning procession. "But you will send," quoth he to that too-clever Hari Lal, "you will send me the Mexican Cockatoo with the comb of flame on his honest head-piece. It was that bird which our bridegroom selected." And I am not sure now with whom lies the victory: for full well did the Oldest Councillor know that that bird was the father-in-law's mascot; so that to give or refrain from giving was ill-luck of equal magnitude. And the father-in-law, he believed in ill-luck.



Punjabi Boy
Servant's Son

THE SUICIDE

Gopal Lal's wife was sick with an illness for which he had no remedy; and Gopal Lal's soul was very heavy, for he loved his wife, and had loved her even before the gift of four sons had proved to all the world that God had blessed him in his village bride. "It is the curse," she told him. "Durgamoi said long ago that one had put a curse upon me."

"Blessing and happiness and four sons, and, in the fourth year after, death and loss of love"—that was the writing of the curse. See, I can show it to you," and she fumbled at a little *mantra* bag at her throat. "It was the curse out of my map of stars. I laughed at the curse, my husband, and I wrote your name on the back of it, to make it nought; and I have worn it here these many years. Indeed, I had forgotten it, when Durgamoi came from the cow-byre at my village birth-place, to remind me: 'Four sons *and in the fourth year after*' . . ."

"This comfort alone have I—death comes before loss of love . . . even in the curse."

"Do not heed the curse, life of me," said Gopal Lal. "See! I make it in pieces. It has gone! These things may live and be true in a village. In a town the *Tar-ram* and the Sarkar-people have made all different. There is no fear; sleep." And he pulled a wad of opium out of a little box which he carried about with him, and gave it her. "This is some magic-working medicine. Sleep will follow the eating, and dreams; and health when dreams are done."

And so he left her, but his own heart was

heavier than he would own. Those were brave words about the *Tar-rams* and the Sarkar, but the star-maps of the Pandits never lied; and the curse came out of a star-map. Try as he would, instance after instance of horoscopes confirmed leapt into his mind. Some he might explain; so could not he explain all. Why, the great lady of the Garden House, past which his footsteps led him even now, was not she an instance?

"He whom this child marries will die within a month of marriage"—so had said the horoscope—and marriage after marriage proposed was abandoned, till they faked a horoscope, and married the child to a man who died within a month of marriage—slipped between the train and the railway platform and died of his injuries. No priest's work that. "Oh! horoscopes were true. Who could unwrite them? . . ."

Alas! and even so did they prove with Gopal Lal. Before the close of the dark fortnight of the moon his dismal convictions had come true, true all the way to the end—to the women's wailing, and the bier and the burning ghat.

The boys were now the puzzle. How control them? How feed them? Gopal Lal sent for his aunt, and made over to her the key of the store-room, with sole charge of all that was in the house. The poor aunt was a shrew, who had too long been loveless, who should never have been childless, and these proxy-children came too late to be of any use to her. Everything they did was wrong.

Nor would that have mattered so much, if in between the wrong-doing and subsequent reproaches they had had the spoilings and caresses to which their mother had accustomed them. She, fond soul, had made a special sugar-ball for each cross word. The little men, astray in a world which had only one rule of rotation, were entirely at the mercy of the moment's emotion.

"You have not eaten your rice, Nagen!" He had not: it was a hot day, and he was not well.

"Eat it at once!"

"I cannot."

"Then you must stand in that corner and do *ut-bos* (rise and sit) a hundred times this evening when the children of Jogesh Babu come to play."

The humiliation of it!

And so it was with each of them.

There came a day in this petty war between the ill-matched, when the aunt said: "I have complained to your father—he desires to see you in his room before he goes to office."

Gopal Lal was worried, and spoke harshly. Was it not enough that God had taken away their mother; must he be further afflicted with disobedient sons?

They heard in silence, and went sadly away to the disused cowshed at the end of the garden, where often, since the coming of the aunt, they had held their confabulations. Said the eldest, ten-year-old Jogesh, dejectedly: "It is true: we are not such men as are pleasing to the mind of a father."

"It is the fault of the aunt. When our mother was alive everyone loved us." Thus Suren, not easily accused.

"But no one does love us now," said Biren.

"Then let us die," declared the five-year-old Nagen. And, after some deliberation, this was settled. "*We shall die*; and at least our father will be sorry."

Jogen, who went to a big school near

College-square, was commissioned to discover how this should be done. "A different way for each," it was decided—four separate deaths.

Now all that is written above I heard from the talk of Nagen and his father and brothers, after I had made the acquaintance of my five-year-old. Him I saw at Christmas-time in the ward of a great hospital. I had been to find some children with whom to play on their special festival; and one darling *sulky* baby lying under a shelf full of toys arrested me.

"He is our suicide," said Sister, smiling at him, "and a most obstinate wee person." And then she told me how he was furious at being snatched back to life. "I promised to die; I promised to die; what will the brother-people say?" The brother-people had all themselves shirked, as a matter of fact, when it came to the point.

Jogen the school-goer was to hang himself; Suren to take poison; Biren to drown himself; and our five-year-old to swallow a hat-pin. They had bought the hat-pin at some fair which stocked "Europe goods". Nagen had smiled at a gaudy picture of King George on the pin-head, before he "took" it. He knew the face: faces of kings brought good luck. But the aunt caught him in the act, and there was a great to-do. His father was actually fetched from office, and he was taken straightway to the big hospital, by poor, tearful Gopal Lal, whose repentance for his preoccupation and harshness, was pitiful to see.

"We will not be an affliction to you any longer," had said the child. "All we men-children will surely die—said you not we were an affliction?"

He had not had speech of his brothers and no news of them was available. The father brought none, and the Sisters knew nothing of his family, and knew very little of the boy's language, so could ask for none.



One darling sulky Baby

But clearly there was something on the child's mind. Wistfully he would peep up at the array of Christmas toys on the shelf above his bed. He had never owned a toy in his life—had, indeed, seen none save lifeless clay images of godlings and animals, coloured out of all recognition. But that elephant was like a live elephant, seen once on Howrah bridge, and never forgotten; and the long "teeth" looked most thrilling; while the horse actually drew the Sahib's carriage, to which it belonged. He knew, for Sister did some magic, and the horse ran with a *whirr-r-r* along the floor. Then there was a ball. The boys on the maidan kicked a ball with bare toes, a bigger ball than that, true; but then they were bigger men-children than he. His toes itched to kick that ball!

But—there was his promise: he had something to do, he had to die, not to kick balls. If only the brother-people would come and tell him a new way to die. For as yet Gopal Lal had not known how to soothe the hurt little baby, to atone for that long-ago reproof; had not, indeed, grasped how deep the hurt had gone. Nagen clenched his fists and turned valiantly from the toys of life to the resolution of death. . . . And so things

were, till one of the brother-people turned up at the hospital, having fulfilled the days of punishment wherein Gopal Lal had kept the brother-people from the little brother.

Nagen had a terrible moment.

"But you *went-out*," he said; "you took poison?"

"Heigh no!" said Suren. "That was fool's talk to make our father sorry, and to make the aunt give us sugar cakes when we are naughty."

And the healthy, coarse-grained Suren does not know to this day why Nagen buried his face in his little hard hospital pillow, and howled his heart out. No doubt he did not know himself, poor child. Do any of us know when the like has happened to us, whether our years be five or twenty-five?

When Sister had soothed him, all he said was: "The world is a big place;" and he lay still for a long time, watching the toys on the shelf of Christmas gifts, watching not furtively now, but with growing desire.

In the afternoon: "Does the horse person *really* run?" said he to Sister. "May I make him taste the whip?" And from that time the recovery of the Suicide was assured.



Mohammedan Boy
Moulvie's Son



Boy training for Hindu Priesthood
Servant's Son, Benares

THE ADOPTION

Winifred was on a visit to India and to me: and at the moment she and I were at breakfast, joined by my five-year-old friend Eric. We sometimes call him a Moon-baby to distinguish him from these others of whom I write; and in temperament he certainly is like moonlight on a clump of lilac bushes. Eric often ran in to breakfast with me, sure of his welcome.

I watched him eating shredded wheat and hot milk with a smile that was a little dangerous to the moment's mouthful, and, "Winifred" I said, "I like a boy at breakfast, don't you? I think I'll always have a boy, always and always, for my very own."

"*Let me be that boy*," said full-mouthed Eric. And from that we got to talking of how I could get hold of a boy. As I explained to Eric I wanted my boy just his own size, &c. We had to reject Eric himself for obvious reasons of pre-emption. But, after being most gratifyingly sorrowful over this fact, Eric gave his great mind to the next best possibility. He ate in solemn silence for a while, then, "I know how you could get one," he declared.

"Oh yes—the boy," we remembered. "How, Eric?"

"May I whisper?" asked Eric with his crooked, shy smile.

"May he whisper, Winifred?" I requested, for this was the first meeting of Eric and Winifred, and he was rather adorably shy at times. Winifred allowed a whisper, so Eric came to my ear and said:

"Say prayers."

"Oh Eric! And a boy will come like you—just as I wish him?"

"Yes," said Eric, "but"—hesitatingly and sadly—"not only one prayer; oh, lots and lots of prayers, and for years and years."

Then he resumed his seat. Things looked a bit discouraging, and he thought so too, for, with an air of "You may as well hear all the worst of it now", he added portentously:

"And it *moughtn't* come a boy after all. It mought be only a girl."

"Oh Eric!"

"Yes, it mought. I prayed and prayed for a boy, and it came a girl—that baby at home who can't even talk. You see it's what there is to spare when they've used up the others. You've got to take what comes."

This conversation came to my mind when a certain little Rani friend of mine wrote to tell me that she was anxious to exercise the right, left to her under her husband's will, and that she wished help and advice in adopting a son. She, at any rate, need not take what "came". Procedure for her would be both more complicated and more simple than Eric's method. So I bade her make choice, and promised to apply my thumb rules when she was ready for them.

This was rather an interesting zenana. I remember so well my first visit. I was led through the outer courtyards of the usual rajbari, past the two painted lion-dragons, which helped the armed watchmen to keep

guard, through narrow passages and a rather attractive rose-garden to the women's staircase. And here my guide left me and fled incontinent, for, as I soon found, the zenana was guarded by peacocks, warranted to peck the eyes out of any male creature whomsoever.

They were terrible protectors, pouncing silently, despite a be-ringed right ankle; and all my security of womanhood and draperies did not prevent a chill clutch at my heart as they came to reconnoitre. I think they must have been clever as well as terrible, for it takes a little observation to separate men and women from each other in a Bengal cold-weather season, when men also wrap themselves in Kashmiri draperies.

But the peacocks never, I am told, made a mistake. "Yet father, brother, sons-in-law, the zenana amlas (officers)? How about these, Rani Sahiba?" I asked.

"Oh," she told me, "the birds are chained up till they learn the faces of the privileged ones."

And it was then, I suppose, "upon the head" of the privileged ones to see that their class was not enlarged.

In the course of time my Rani had her suggestions ready. Choice of a son for the dead raja was difficult; for many things had to be avoided. He might not be an only son, and the fiction of sonship must be observed. No one could be adopted whose mother the late "father" could not have married. This excluded her first choice, the son of her husband's sister.

Again, the boy must not yet have been admitted into the spiritual sonship of his own family. This barred among others a charming boy whom I myself saw invested with the sacred thread. "But you can't have him, Rani Sahiba; all his spiritual value is already pledged to the uses of his natural father. His prayers cannot help Raja Sahib." And she understood this far better than the

mundane obstacles, which I had to allege later against other selections.

Finally, however, a boy was found of the right class, and caste, and possibility of real sonship; and I was as excited as the zenana over the great ceremony which would presently go forward.

And now the day itself was here, and I was set down at three o'clock of a morning at the foot of the hills in what looked like remarkably pretty country.

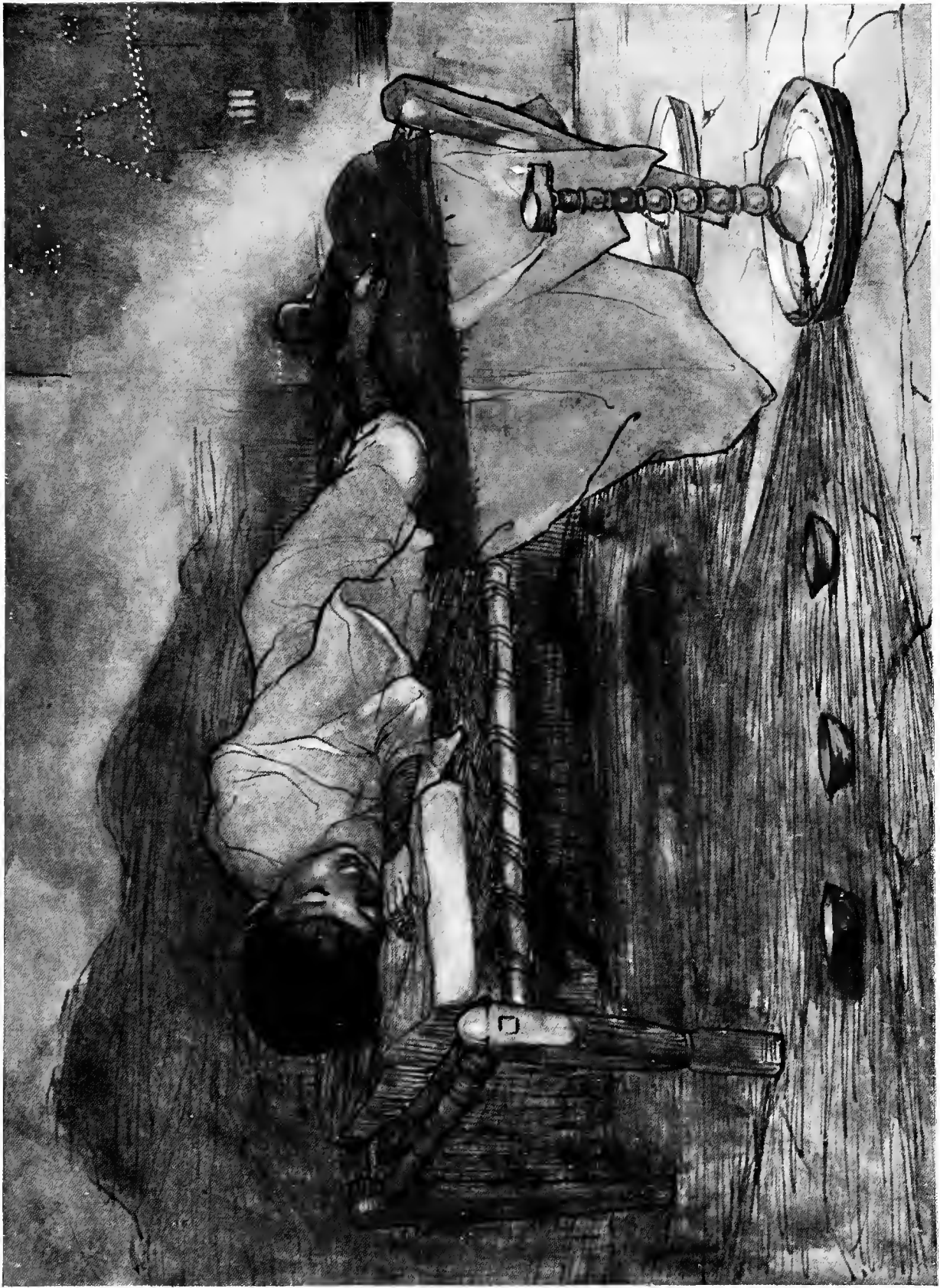
"If Miss Sahib cares to wait till the dawn hour or for a night of the moon, she will see the wild peacocks come out of the jungle and dance."

I did so want to ask if the peacock sentries were allowed to go to the wild peacocks' ball just once in a way: and if sentry peacocks retired from service to be professional chaperones at dances; but such frivolity would not have been understood, so I exercised a wise restraint.

"And, if the Miss Sahib will come in the days of cold and stay in the little bungalow beyond the canal, she can join in the big Shikar. Oh, a very big shikar is necessary every year to kill the things that are not peacock-people in that same jungle which climbs to the hill tops."

We drove in an ancient phaeton for a few miles, and I was getting restive at the incongruity of an English phaeton for this hour and this country-side and this occasion, when my guide spoke once more: "At the fourth mile the carriage-road stops; the Miss Sahib will forgive that there will then be conveyances of the country." The Miss Sahib rejoiced.

The country was indeed lovely. To my right gleamed the sluggish canal, slimy and shiny as a snake, drowsing between mud banks. This is the chief water-way for country boats laden with hay, or for the "green" boat, the local house-boat, perilous



The Adopted Son at the End of the Day

as to kitchen and stuffy as to cabin, but most picturesque to the eye of the onlooker. Now we had come upon a boat at anchor, and a very populous green boat taking an entire colony to another part of the country. The mother was cooking the evening meal safely on shore, and a small "goose boy", aged four and dressed in an amulet, was trying with a long thin wisp of cane to gather his chickens back to the boat. Beyond the canal the horizon had been pushed away and away, and it was some time before I realized that the gigantic "Love-in-a-mist" plant-like trees were dying bamboos. They gave weird cobwebby effect to a landscape in which indeed nothing at that moment seemed real.

To my left the low shrub was full of things to see: birds and lizards, jackals and khargosh, a million butterflies—while here, close by the road, was a sacred tree shadowing an army of mud horses.

The god at the foot of the tree was fond of riding, so pilgrims brought him little mud-horses for keepsakes. To the Rani the same pilgrims brought a cow apiece. In a minute we had come upon their grazing-ground—the loveliest sight, for the dainty little creatures had to be milk-white, and were stalled in the temple fields—a pleasing harmony in white and green.

Straight from the grazing-ground began the ascent of the hills to the great temple itself. When I came to travel this bit, I had already long since changed into my "conveyance of the country". It was a red-enamelled carrying-chair, most comfortable, but oh, so noisy! for my lusty Ooriya carriers shouted at the top of their voices "hum-hum, hum-hum, hum-hum," between middle C and its octave, till they got tired, when they would begin on the higher note and end on the lower.

"What does it *mean*?" I begged, thinking a meaning would help me to bear it better.

"Oh just mad talk," they said grinning, and went at it again.

The wood was thickening, planted with white barked trees slim and tall, and dressed in spring clothes of the colour of the olive groves at Bordighera.

Before I had done loving the trees we had arrived at the temple, and the bearers set me down in a lane of flag-staffs, their light-hearted welcome all a-flutter—red and blue, pilgrim-colour, sun-yellow and deep amber, earth-brown, and wheat-colour. . . . It is impossible to describe the effect.

Between the flags I walked to an enclosure made of plaited twigs. It shut in a great pond fed by a sacred spring. The Rani bathed in this pond, and then walked past more little flag-decorations to her special temple house. Here she sat watching the preliminary ceremony in the old old temple, grey stone against forest green. Nothing there was, to outward seeing, which kept it from being the temple of all the world. Siva and his bull, and other gods and godlings, lived within doors. The ceremony was performed in the verandah, facing God's out-of-doors, and all the beauty of that temple not built with hands.

The actual adoption was very simple indeed. The boy's father and mother stood on one side of him and the Rani on the other.

"Will you give?" "Will you take?" were asked and answered; and there was my Rani with a boy of her very own, who should save the soul of the dead raja, and fill up all that was wanting on her sonless hearth.

As for the boy himself—he was wide-mouthed, wistful, with the listening look of the deaf-mute. But he was neither deaf nor mute; his expression was but the result of an intense desire to please. He had seen his very own mother give him away, not sadly but with much self-gratulation. "The family would all now belong to Raj-people."

He had heard his merits and demerits discussed by a hundred folk, and he was nine years old, old enough to understand. His temperament was such that the greatness and importance thrust upon him were lost in the hurt of losing his own people, and in the desire to please these other great ones.

"Well," I said, as he sat wearied out with the day, a pathetic wee figure, "tell me all about it."

"I was bathed and had new clothes and my head was shaved. So I am a 'Son given', and my mother cannot love me. It is sin."

For the first time I realized the blessed immunity of the babe natural, in its unconscious ceremony of sonship.

Now all things being well over at the temple, a procession was formed to travel back through the forest to the feasts and rejoicings. First came the dancers and pike-bearers, a gorgeous company in bright red uniforms, their arms bound about with peacocks' feathers. They were followed by crowds and crowds of people—zenana folk in palkis and hooded carrying-chairs, men on elephants, on horses, on foot, or sitting under umbrellas on wheels drawn by atoms of ponies. It was an endless coil, priests and laymen, raj-folk and peasants, winding between the grey-green saplings straight towards the sunset.

And such riot of colour as met my eye is

achieved but seldom even in this land of colour—the great open cauldron of the sky, and the hot-coal colour of the wild men's uniform, then the patchwork of the crowd, and the cool green of the forest for background. From the mysticism of my cobweb landscape I was thrust on to the stage of some fantastic Eastern theatre.

Then suddenly it was dark, and as suddenly a hundred torches leapt into life, and all that was gorgeous or garish was now lurid and sinister and creepy. The stage had gone. This was some one's too-real inferno. The pike dancers leapt higher, and the beat of the drums grew frenzied; but the heart of the uncanny lay in the continued orderliness of this great disorder, passing from the deep shadows of the forest into that greater darkness which the torches had created. And across the drums and conch shells the wild peacocks called to the evening dance in the scrub below the foothills.

I did not see the zenana peacocks in the rajbari that evening, and asked for my terrible acquaintances.

"But they have been let fly, Miss Sahib, and we think they have gone to the mountains. The son will now choose such bird or beast thing as pleaseth him to guard this zenana. To-night he himself sleeps guarded by the lamps which lit the home-coming of the Son Adopted."



Maratha Girl, High-caste
Bombay

BHOLA—I

I saw him first on the landing as I came out of the bedroom in the morning. He was in a spotless white chapkan, a fat cummerbund, and a turban which belonged to ten times his years. His years seemed six. He salaamed solemnly, bowing and keeping his head in his hand at the salaam, till I got to the breakfast-room. So, silently, he did me reverence, each time I passed and repassed: and this happened every day at the breakfast hour for close on a month, no explanation asked or offered, and always that silent figure in spotless much-starched white.

Then I spoke. "Who is this?" The child said never a word, but the khitmatgar explained that it was an applicant for service in the household.

"We want no children," I said: for full well I knew the breakages which would be set against his name, poor scapegoat.

The khitmatgar explained this to the child, and I felt reproachful as I saw him bend his head sideways (a special little mannerism), as proof that he understood and agreed.

Yet—there he was just the same next morning, salaaming mutely! In a week I gave in, and told the khitmatgar that the child might work under his orders at anything that turned up.

The salaams now greeted me all over the house; there was a statue of reverence in every corner, quiet and established, without haste or apparent transmigration. Did I enter the drawing-room, there was the image before me, so in my writing-room, or the

passage; my bedroom alone was immune. However, I made no protest, and the starched little machine gradually subsided into the back regions.

I was next conscious of it on pay-day, and it received its pittance with such a flourish of salutations that I felt shamefaced till bedtime. Not rupees, but some Distinguished Service Order was his due. I knew it.

Thereafter the salaams gave place to posies. I found a posy by my breakfast-plate, on the dressing-table, on the writing-table, beside my after-dinner novel near the sofa . . . everywhere, always a fresh little posy of the daintiest composition, and tied with my own "lingerie"-ribbon begged from the ayah. And the posies were all the sign I had of my latest "slave" for close on a fortnight.

Then came a dinner-party day, and, as I heard afterwards, no work could be got out of the imp that day; no errands would he run for whomsoever, from khitmatgar to sweeper; and all day he bathed himself at the pipe near the stables, running between-whiles to the dhobie to see that his clothes were all starched.

Just as we sat down to dinner I heard remonstrance from the bottle-khana.

"I must, it's my right," from the infant. "Beware!" from the khit; "I will take your life if you do."

But nothing happened till just as we were leaving the dining-room, when the imp ran in triumphant, and carried off my plate, to assert himself, withal.

I forgot to speak about this next morning when some folk came to breakfast; and there was more self-assertion, the imp running in again and flourishing a mustard-pot in the face of a sahib, who, as it happened, had nothing before him. We could not help laughing, for it was so evidently "There—you shall have mustard at least, and from me."

Thereafter I did speak, quietly but firmly: the infant was meekness incarnate, bent his head sideways and salaamed. But every now and then there still would be an incursion.

Presently I was off to England for my holiday, and I asked all the servants, as is my wont, what fairings they would like me to bring them.

The infant said nothing before the other servants, but finding me alone he came in to ask, in a whisper, for a top. I said he should have it, and he scuttled away to boast of this indulgence. Evidently "back - regions" laughed at him for his modesty, for next day he found me again.

"Is it permitted to speak?"

"Yes."

"Is it permitted to change my desire?"

"It is."

"Then I want *a watch*."

"Oh! ho!"

"Oh, a *little watch*" (making a tiny O of finger and thumb).

"Little watches cost a lot."

"Then a *big watch*" (hands wide), and he ran away.

He got his watch and his top; but it was the top which made him speechless, eyes stretching, till I feared they would drop out of his head.

But this was on my return home when he had got past the floods of tears which, all dignity thrown to the winds, he shed on the doorstep as I set forth.

"There's the sea; it's big!"

"I'll be back in three months."

"But the sea is big!"

There came a day when at the khitmatgar's request I had the infant up for a scolding.

"The khitmatgar says you do no work. You but play or tease the servants. That is not fit. You are a great boy now, not a child. How old are you?"

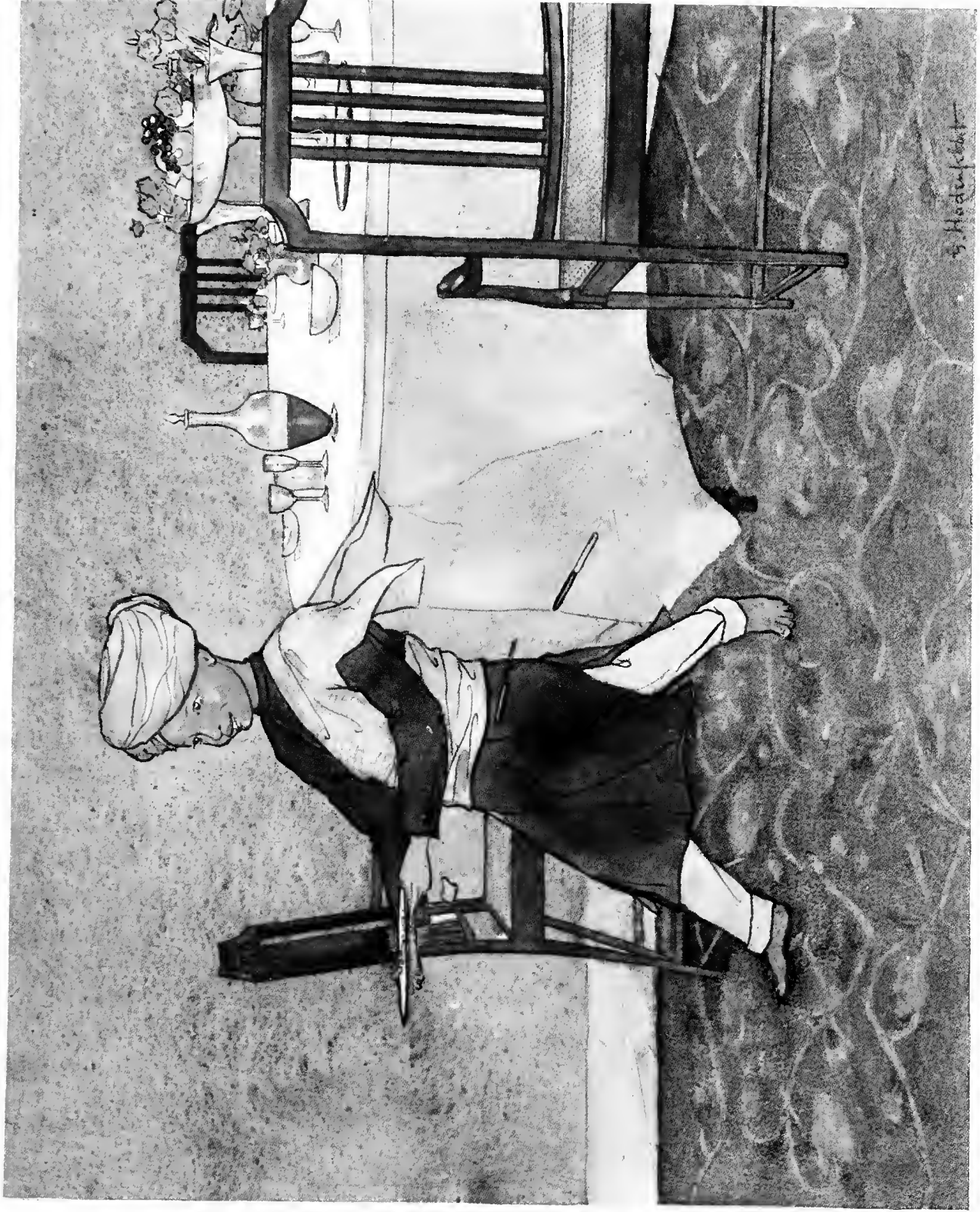
"Two."

At this I exploded. It was most comical, dignity, meekness, and the big turban taken together; and there was an end of my attempt at discipline. When I wrote to the Silent One about my domestic worries once upon a time, he wrote back: "Leniency is a mistake: a snap in time saves nine." But my snaps are extravagant in headaches for myself—and save nothing in domestic or feudal economy I am sure; while with the imp they always end *comme ca*.

And the ayah reported that on this particular occasion the imp said to her: "Why is it talk of laughter when I tell the Miss Sahib my age? I *am* two. I was one when I became the Miss Sahib's slave. Is this not my second year of service? I *am* two!"



Bengali Girl



The Imp ran in triumphant and carried off my Plate

BHOLA—II

Bhola grew fast, the size of his turban diminishing with his years.

Now he was able to act under-khit with success, and very critical was he of any new-comer who happened to be his Chief of the moment. "That is not the way things are done here. That is hotel dustoor," was his most withering remark.

On such occasions I looked "with my eyelids", except when it came to glaring corrections such as changing a knife from right to left of one's plate (the child was ever left-handed); and he stood on one leg and explained to me before he salaamed good-night that he had so much fear that the new-comer would go wrong, that it turned his own head. "Our ways are our ways. Who else should know them?" he concluded.

Over my attempt to introduce to the household a masalchi younger than himself, he was downright nasty. No peace had the younger boy, and I overheard the conclusion of one of their many quarrels—"I have no fear. Who will stay in the house and who will go, I know."

To me however no word was said; Bhola spoke little in my presence, and never if a nod or a shake of the head would do instead.

The younger boy did go—being of rather a sly disposition. I repeated no experiments.

But Bhola, no doubt bloated with success, got more assertive, and made himself my special providence. It was not till long after

that I learned that no new servant was allowed to approach me who had not been censored by Bhola.

"The caste was low," or "The houses in which they had served were not like—us—people's houses."

He developed a real taste for flowers, became an artist as to what colours suited my room, and had great contempt for the ministrations of other people's malis.

"God gives the garden," I heard him mutter to himself on the verandah of a friend's house in the mofussil, "but how should God also give indoors-sense to the mali who tends the garden?"

But, better even than as house-decorator, he fancied himself as model for bandaging at ambulance classes. He called it "teaching us doctor—i"—and much did he presume on that knowledge. He felt that it was his province to judge of health or sickness in regard to himself, as in regard to every one in the household.

As long as a beloved nurse, who had taken care of me in more than one illness, was in Calcutta, Bhola would force his way into her house, a silent and sad apparition, whenever he thought that I seemed below the weather.

"Did Miss Sahib send for me?" she has told me she would ask.

A shake of the head.

"But is she ill?"

A violent nod—and with the one word "Come!" he would be off.

When she left Calcutta his ingenuity was taxed.

On one occasion, when I was really ill, he fidgeted outside the door at bedtime.

"You there, Bhola? Go home!"

"I do not leave this house till I have brought a doctor," was Bhola's firm reply. "What for have I taught the Miss Sahib Doctor-i? It is a case for a doctor. True word. That I know."

His one cowardice was his own health, born I am persuaded of that experience as an ambulance-lecture model.

He has come to me cold with fear—"I am ill; it is a bad illness!"

"Oh Bhola, what is the matter?" I was really impressed by his manner and his terror.

"*A bad illness*; my breath escapes, when I come upstairs. It will one day escape, and not be retaken. *I will die!*"

Another day it was, "A bad illness, in a place that cannot be shown." He was finally persuaded to show me the illness. It was only a line of prickly heat, where he had tied the string of his pyjamas rather too tightly.

Yet again, he had been to the doctor while I was out of Calcutta, and told me with pride that the doctor had put a rubber into his chest, and written something on a paper, and that a friend had said it was certainly "Amonia". I was reassured on finding that the doctor had given him a tonic for "general debility".

"What shall I do? My liver is becoming a stone," was another wide-eyed complaint of fear, made with his hand on an ill-digesting chest.

The proudest moment of his Sun-baby life arrived however just as he was leaving Sun-babyhood, when the sudden illness of my travelling boy put him momentarily on duty for a journey.

He had new clothes, and the bearer lent him his tin trunk. He begged that the box

might companion my own luggage; and at almost every station he came into my carriage on some pretext or another to pack and unpack this. We were going up to the Hills and the journey was long. He changed his clothes so often that he arrived in his Plains clothing, having worn his smart warm livery through some of the hottest parts of the journey, changing whenever fear of spoiling it laid hold on him.

He arrived a shivery mortal, in a white chapkan, the key of his box lost en route, and a scout's knife I had given him, stolen while he slept. But, "my box looks a great traveller," he commented, with all the wile of a bride attempting to damage her new travelling-duds.

Later in the day, I overheard this brief dialogue on the verandah of the hotel—"Ho brother! This is the first journey you have made. You will be more careful when you get your teeth."

And Bhola with great scorn: "My first journey? Look at my box!"

A habit, all his own, was to vary the photographs on my dressing-table according to what he imagined I needed at the moment. If I seemed worried, it would be the photograph of some woman or baby-friend who had stayed with me—the psychology of that was subtle. On big days my family was favoured. Old photographs were fished out of a cemetery of such, which is tidily hidden away in the box-room, and were fitted into as ancient frames, to greet me.

Once only he spoke on the subject of photographs. "That," he said, of a child grown to manhood and a commission in a war-year, whom we met unexpectedly in Northern India, "that, is the son of so and so."

"How do you know?" I asked.

"Oh," he said, "is not the map of him and of his mother all over our house?"

About the war he had his own beliefs; and for the ills brought by the war his own specific.

"Are our friends in danger in England? Why not ask all peoples of them, to come and stay with us? So shall everything be right."

One morning he was shamelessly late in putting in an appearance.

"By what means could I come sooner?" he asked. "On the maidan, women were making war just like Sahib log, only their knees were not bare." (He had apparently watched the Calcutta Scottish). "And a mem sahib of ours" (he meant a friend of mine) "was teaching them at parade to make war. There was no way to come earlier."

As I write this postscript, Bhola has come to me with a very serious puzzle. His father and mother are old. He gives them his wages: but his mother has pointed out that it is his duty to give them a wife also. His mother says she is too old to go on cooking and doing for the family. She and her husband may die any moment. Bhola must marry an eight-year-old maid-of-all-work, because to die without seeing his wife would be "talk of great misfortune" to his parents, they said.

Bhola had fought these arguments for two years, according to his account. He had said: "This is talk of villages: we of towns, who give advice to Raj-people, do not marry so early." And he confessed to me that he had added: "If you wait till I am of age to marry, Miss Sahib may pay the expenses of the wedding." (Truly Bhola's faith or presumption were getting past control.)

"But they won't wait any longer. Is there

a little-anything now that remains for me to do?" he asked, depressed.

I said the father and mother were to come and see me. They came that night:—both middle-aged, hale and able-bodied people.

I was very angry at the way they were exploiting the child, on whose wages they had lived, apparently ever since he was eight years old. I poured scorn on them liberally—laved them in it. But I could not move them. I then found that they had borrowed money from the girl's father, and the marriage was to clear the debt. When Bhola heard this, he took matters into his own hands. "I will clear that debt," he said "with rupees. For the other matter, the cooking of the food, I will pay a rupee a month to a servant. If the servant is bad, we can exchange him. With whom could I exchange that girl of eight, if she were worthless?"

I felt the matter was under competent management. Bhola is still a bachelor. And there are stirrings in Bhola of a soul.

"May I have leave," he asked, "when the Miss Sahib is on tour, to go a little distance from Calcutta?"

"What for, Bhola?"

"Miss Sahib sees that I am getting lazy; I am late in the mornings; my eyes shut unbidden, and I sleep, yes, in the day, I sleep over my work. I will take my father and mother and we will go to the tomb of a holy faqir: and we will ask the maulvi who serves the tomb to tie a string round my wrist that the devil of sloth may be driven out of me."

"And if it should not depart that way, Bhola?"

"Then, it is written that the Miss Sahib will pardon me," said Bhola, great in faith (or in presumption) to the end.



Mohammedan Boy, Servant Class
Bombay

SHUBALA

When I first saw Shubala, she was six years old, a fat little bundle of smiles and roundnesses bunched up in a bright red sari yards too roomy for her. She was keeping wicket for her brother Madan Mohun, aged eight.

It was a lovesome sight, that game of cricket. Madan and Shubala, and Madan's Bengali tutor (whose acquaintance with the game had hitherto been that of a spectator on the Calcutta maidan), playing together in the most delicious confusion possible, of persons and of parties. Of like incongruity was the setting of the game.

They played on a strip of grass between a ruined temple and the steps of a bathing ghat: and the loin-girt priests made their way to the water, across the most thrilling of "runs". When I remonstrated for the safety of the holy men, "Oh!" said Madan, "the ball *knows* it is a priest-man: it won't hurt him." And the priest-man acknowledged this deference by scouting for the trio as he passed. It was this same old priest-man who told Shubala god-tales, as they sat below the image of the Wise One, the elephant-headed.

The children had only one other game. It was played with the patron gods and goddess of their rajbari. These were Juggernaut and his brother and sister—the gods with human busts, be-skirted, to cover their leglessness. Madan told me the legend which explains this: "The divine carver was really a warrior not a carver, so, when the trumpet sounded

for battle, he hastily seized his own turban, and tore it into strips, to make the petticoats which hid the fact that his work was unfinished, and so he was able to go at once to the war."

These gods are likeliest of any to the dolls of childhood, and it was no wonder that Madan and my Shubala, finding them in the house of worship (the Puja Ghar), should beg duplicates for the house of play. These they installed in a garden temple the size of a dolls' house, built by themselves of bricks and covered with palm leaves; and Madan would strip to the waist, smearing his body and forehead with ashes, in imitation of the old priest-man; and Shubala would pull her sari over her face showing only the tip of her saucy nose, and would bring wreaths of marigolds "to do puja" in imitation of the women who visited the priest-man's temple across the way.

Once I found Madan Mohun drawing a most realistic picture of the Juggernauts. I drew him a horse. "And here," I said, "is the horse on which your warrior-carver rode away to battle."

The child almost sat down on his brick-palm-leaf temple in his astonishment. "Will horses come for me?" he asked in a voice of awe, large-eyed. Then, slowly, "Will *anything* come for me—out of this pencil?"

And, with patience, I extracted the knowledge that the dear baby had said to the Juggernauts at his puja game, "It is of necessity that I now leave you for slate-

pencil lessons; but come and sit inside my pencil." And so—was it not only natural that their "form" miracles came on to his slate? But could other form-miracles come, even when you did not worship them? Could your own hand do it? It was a very wonderful world. Truly was it a world of wonder and of beauty.

This was the beginning of the childrens' acquaintance with many of the joys of childhood; and toy-people, and flesh and blood animal-people, soon took the place of the Juggernauts reserved for worship.

I always looked forward to my visits to this particular rajbari. Only part of the road was travelled by rail; the excitements came when your "fire-carriage" dumped you down in a nowhere kind of place among green fields and far distances: for was there not then an assortment of "carrying people", awaiting your choice?

There was a palki with its dozen bearers, naked to the waist and glistening in the heat; there was an old springless bullock-wagon, in which you might ride the while your bearers carried the luggage strung in rope baskets like a brace of milk pails at either end of a long stick: and there was the trio of elephants: "The Speedy Beloved", "The Beloved of Ganda", and "The Perfection of Beauty".

These were their names, the mahout told me: but, even before I heard their delicious "name-placings", I had, of course, decided that the elephants and none other should take me to the bari.

The "Speedy Beloved" I soon found was so named in order—it is an educational method to be commended—to entice him to some small pretence of movement. The "Beloved of Ganda" was the elderly widow of one Ganda, long deceased. When she was found, a wild thing in the forests of Sylhet, Ganda, her husband, was standing

beside her, decorating her head and trunk with long trails of blossom which he tore from the flowering creepers overhead. So the "Beloved of Ganda" she was named forthwith, and she carried into captivity the memory of that last day of play and adoration.

When first I rode "The Perfection of Beauty", he was only three years of age, and I slipped off his back by way of his tail more than once on the journey across the fields and village ways. I had forgotten that a baby elephant's back slopes suddenly; but I landed on my feet each time, so no harm was done; and his pace was almost equine. Even with our frequent remountings we arrived at the bari a full hour ahead of Ganda and the Speedy one.

Aided by time, "Perfection" has grown a most reliable back, but there is a year-old baby who now meets my train, trotting by Mrs. Ganda's side, simply because he refuses to be left at home on any excursions. This creature, "The Warrior Emperor", amuses me greatly by gurgling and slobbering, sucking his trunk as a human baby sucks its thumb, and offering it to my sturdy Perfection to suck also, much to my alarm.

It is usually four of a morning when I mount my elephant, and all the world is grey mist, or may be silver-grey if it has been a late night of the moon. Emerald-green fields stretch away to a blur which means the palms and huddled mat huts of a village: and beyond the village is the dark blue-purple line of hills. Often have I seen the gleaming arch of a rainbow lying across the distant shadow, and I have never known which I love best, that, or the mist colour of the winter dawn with nothing but its under-sigh of pale blush-pink for promise.

In the rains there is also the fishing, since we must ride the longer way to the bari. The bridges are washed away, and we splash or swim through the floods, so that I and the

space on which I sit on Perfection's back are the only outlying islands of dryness, on that entire march.

Ganda carries the luggage, and why that greater weight is not at least as safe as I am, I never know: but I resign myself to seeing the luncheon-basket follow my dressing-case into the water the colour of *café-au-lait*.

After all, there are many rescuers at hand, and, if *bakshish* and insecure ropes do not offer an explanation, "out of whom if not out of the Miss Sahib should we make for to eat?" as said one of the rescuers.

I would like to point out that they are welcome to the *bakshish* without this disastrous rescue-practice on my long-suffering luggage; but that would not I suppose be fair to custom.

At these times of year the population, dressed in mat hats and loin cloths, drive the simple country plough, or sow rice with a vigour which has changed my ideas of the apathetic *ryot*. Those who are not ploughing, or planting out the bright green rice, are fishing. They make a primitive lock enclosing the water within practicable limits, then, slinging mat baskets between ropes, they bail the water out of the lock, and either catch the fish in the baskets, or pick them out of the mud with their fingers.

Madan Mohun and Shubala were always much amused that I enjoyed watching this diversion.

They got into the habit of coming along the road to meet me, because I was pleased that they had shown this courtesy to an English friend whom once upon a time I took with me to visit my *bari* friends of the river bank. "We must show her our gladness that she has come," said the Rani. So out-riders met us along the road between the station and the *bari* in very great style; and Madan and Shubala met us nearer home as I have said: and later in the day when, after

a rest in our little tent encampment, we went to see the *ranis*, Rani-Ma took the hand of my friend, and smiling upon her led her to and fro upon the roof terrace. "We have as yet no one language", she explained, "but desire is great to show the *Mem Sahib* that she is welcome."

In course of time the Rani said: "Madan Mohun must now leave this waste place and go to a town for his lessons." So they said good-bye to the waste place, which indeed the river was devastating more every year, and the entire family, including the Rani and the step-grandmother - Rani, and Shubala, and Madan Mohun, and two baby leopards, and many kittens and guinea-pigs, and a mangy yellow *pi-dog*, and a grey parrot, came to the big British town nearest the waste place and settled there, in a hired *bari*, till we should build them a house to their liking.

The first disaster that happened was that one of the leopards broke through his cage, and Madan Mohun was only just saved alive. So we gave both beasts to the Zoo, without delay, and Madan and Shubala cried bitter tears.

But a twofold consolation was at hand; their guinea-pigs bred furiously (as is the manner of guinea-pigs), and the children discovered the uses of shops. Indeed I had even to put these two extravagant and foolish children-people upon a toy allowance in order to save us all from bankruptcy. Nevertheless the allowance ran to a large family of dolls for Shubala, and she would worry the *zenana-amla* till he produced a graded series of china German-mades; then the father and mother and their twelve children, each a head shorter than the other, would be put to bed on a huge *takht-posh* to save trouble, while she played with the kittens and guinea-pigs which she always loved best of all.

As for Madan Mohun, he was an entirely satisfactory boy—fat and frank, and in many ways very like an English schoolboy. But, unlike an English schoolboy, he seldom got into trouble.

I can remember only one occasion on which I had to be severe. His mother sent him to the house to be scolded about some little thing, and we talked it out, Madan making me a promise, which to my sorrow he broke very soon after.

When his mother sent him again, with the message that the promise was broken, Madan gave the message but added: "People in zenanas do not know that if you curl your fingers and toes inside, when you say a promise-thing, it is not a promise. So I did not break a promise, did I? And I am still a gentleman."

Meantime Shubala had been growing and growing: and it was time for her marriage, and the mother and grandmother were deliciously quaint while inspecting the candidates who claimed her. But at last selection was made, and we had a great wedding, a gorgeous combination of old-time custom and

modern invention, of processions of stuffed animals and life-sized boats, and comic mud figures, and electric illuminations, and a flower-decked motor-car for the brand-new bridegroom! And, to my joy, when the festivities were over, Shubala returned to babyhood. But "Shubala Married" must be a story by itself. She lives in the Inside, and can no more play cricket or visit the mad old priest at the elephant-temple.

Madan Mohun sympathizes, and does what he can in memory of past good-fellowship. The notices of his games-club are posted on the outer wall of the zenana, and he allows Shubala to design costumes for the players. "International Football Club" was the notice which I read on one occasion.

"Rainy weather calls players to amusement" in explanation whereof Madan Mohun told me that, as secretary and founder of the Club, it behoved him to feed the team with sweets, on days when rain spoilt play.

"But why amusement, Madan Mohun?"

"Because the game is work," said this wise Bengali convert to the British gospel of play.



Punjabi Mohammedan girl

WANGLO

I cannot get any reliable information about Wanglo's birthplace. Some say that it was a Chinese port, some that he was born on the high seas: but this much is certain that he was blue-blooded and a British subject—and that ought to be enough for you.

When he was put into my arms he looked exactly like a yellow muff bought at the most expensive shop in London. And I am ashamed to say my heart misgave me. I had pined for a blue-black Chow doggie ever since I saw an infinitesimal atom of a blue-black thing, with ears erect and black beads for eyes, going for a walk on the maidan, my first day in Bengal.

But it had come yellow, "and you've got to take what comes", as Eric my friend, aged six, had said about the baby sister whom he had hoped would be a boy.

But it did not need the sight of the blue-black puppy grown rusty in dog-hood to convert me to my Wanglo. The big amber brown eyes effected that in two seconds. And let me warn you that you will be a very unwise person indeed if you pray for a little Chow puppy dog to "come" anything but yellow, from the very beginning.

Of course the yellow muff had to be called "Wanglo", after the Dumpy Book: and as such I introduced him to my household.

At the moment my household was all Tibetan: and my really beautiful and smiling ayah, who wore turquoise-blue charms and earrings; and the funny slant-eyed cook who

had begun life as a "fitter" on a railway, deserve special mention.

The cook was a timid creature, afraid to be in his kitchen alone after dark, because, as he explained to the khitmatgar, the ghosts of all the things which the Miss Sahib had eaten walked in unending procession round and round his kitchen at lamp-lighting time. I asked to be invited to see the ghost of some whitebait which I had just eaten: but he looked scared, and told the old bearer-man in strict confidence that the Miss Sahib should really not tempt the devil-folk in this manner.

But, timid or brave, all my dear hill-servants were devoted to Wanglo, and welcomed him so genuinely that I decided to import a Tibetan for his dog-boy also.

In a week the khitmatgar came to me solemnly with a message from the household. "We have discovered Wanglo Sahib's caste," said he. "He is of the same caste as us-folk."

There is a Bhutan dog rather like a Chinese Chow, and, thinking this was what he meant, and not wishing to deceive the servants, I said: "Yes—he is rather like a Bhutia, is he not? But he comes from China."

"That," said the khitmatgar, brushing aside my information, "is of no care. He is of our caste. We know it."

"How do you know it, Kancha?"

"He is so sensible!" said the wise hill-man. And to all the privileges of caste folk Wanglo was forthwith admitted.

But at dinner-time he was called "Chota

Sahib" (Little Master), and a small tablecloth was laid for him on the floor beside me. He really had the most beautiful manners, for he would not eat till I was served, however close his nose might be to his very own mess of pottage.

Moreover, that same mess had to be served in a blue china bowl. Wanglo was most fastidious. When the dog-boy broke the bowl, Wanglo refused his dinner from an old white pudding-basin. He would eat out of blue china, or he would starve.

"Wah! Wah!" said the servants. "The wisdom-fulness of the Chota Sahib. Said we not he was of our caste!" And the blue bowl was quickly replaced.

Dear wee Wanglo, I can see him as I write of him, looking plaintively at me, his mouth watering with eagerness, while I stupidly sat reading, neglecting my food, and forcing my well-bred henchman to neglect his also.

It was no wonder that he ruled us all: to the devotion of a lover he added the attractive imperiousness of a child, taking for granted our own affection and service. For myself, I never knew what I wanted till Wanglo had declared his mind. And in the hot weather it was a very changeable mind indeed—poor bushy-haired dog-person.

He slept on a mat near a window in my room: and, just as I had dropped asleep, "*Thud, Thud*" would go his heavy tail. I knew what it meant. It meant "Turn off that electric fan".

And I would say: "Oh please, Wanglo! I can't do without it."

But "*Thud, Thud*," he would answer, till I got up and turned it off.

Then just as I had captured sleep once more—" *Thud, Thud, Thud*," again from Wanglo. He now wanted it on!

"Oh! he is very sensible," said Ayah; "truly, Miss Sahib, he is just like a man."

But, of whatever caste or rank or creation,

and however it was manifested, Wanglo certainly had sense: and, as has been said, he early showed both faithfulness and affection. I remember one instance of his puppyhood. I had left some papers in the garden where I was writing. "Take care of these, Wanglo," I told him; and thereafter not even my own servants dare touch the papers on my table in Wanglo's presence; while me he guarded as a body-guard a sovereign, his erect little ears more alert than those of a sentry.

His coat became the loveliest golden brown, and his tail was like a fried whiting, making, in course of time, a great dent in his back where the curl had settled. As for his eyes, they were the loveliest, most luminous pools of amber light ever seen.

Naturally I was debarred from wearing any colour but that which suited Wanglo—pinks and reds were of course taboo; dead yellows, and browns, and autumn tints, were all he allowed me.

Every morning he went for a walk with his Tibetan dog-boy, and greeted my friends as they rode on the maidan—"the dog taking the boy for a walk," as they told me afterwards: for Wanglo soon looked about twice as large as his caretaker, and as frightening as a wild beast. Strangers not being dog-lovers were indeed terrified of him; but all children loved him at once, recognizing his gentleness.

I had in those days a grey pony, and Wanglo was fiercely jealous of her, till I explained to him that Griselda was also one of the family: and then he became so devoted that he would run in and out among her legs, or jump up to lick her nose in a way that might have been dangerous with any but my patient Grizel.

Every afternoon he would be waiting for Grizel and me at the turning near the maidan on our return from office, and he would race home with us, yapping and leaping with joy.

Never was such a welcome as Wanglo could give. If I were driving out again later in the afternoon, Wanglo insisted on coming too, on the seat beside me: but he never quite liked the tum-tum which I drive, and would stand on his hind legs, his forepaws clasped round my neck, a habit both perilous and disconcerting on the occasions when Grizel met a tram and needed driving, and when "Miss Sahib must be patient with the mare and me," as explained the syce, "we are not used to the ways of big towns."

To my visitors Wanglo was courtesy itself—a perfect little yellow knight—showing them upstairs, and waiting for them to follow, if they were slow; lying outside the door to take them back to their carriages, and standing on the steps to see them off with a wag of the fried-whiting tail.

For one thing I could find no help. My journeys away from home always distressed him; yet it was not possible to take him with me, and the servants told me how pitifully he would look for me—sniffing about the house, watching at the home-coming place; nosing round Grizel, as if to puzzle out why I was away when Grizel was in the stable.

There came a day when I was away for a whole month, and Wanglo, I was told, every day more dejected than the last, after hunting for me everywhere, would lie on the steps watching the drive, with eyes which grew sadder and sadder. He refused food even out of his blue china bowl. After trying all persuasions, the servants took him to the friend whom he recognized as my chief friend in Calcutta; daily she told him that I was coming back, and from her hand he would sadly eat a little biscuit; but that was all; he would not dine, except with me.

This long fast, combined with the chill

of the marble steps on which he lay, was, of course, very bad for his poor little dog-machinery: and finally the devoted Tibetan carried him to the veterinary hospital. But the surgeon said: "This is mind sickness not body sickness," and the little people wept and wrote to me to say: "Please come home quickly or our Chota Sahib will die."

And, when I did come home, Wanglo was skin and bone, but he was there, lying on the steps; and he leapt up to my shoulders in the old way, and snapped my muff chain in two, as of old—and I felt that we would soon get him well now.

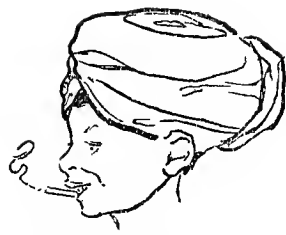
"But don't leave him behind again," said the doctor.

So, two days later, I took him with me on tour, and he shared my railway carriage, and was supremely happy.

But in the night a little paw tugged at the bed-clothes, and I turned on the light to find Wanglo's darling face all twisted with pain, and his eyes great prayers of trustfulness.

He died in the train, just as day was breaking, and we left him to be buried at a place on the line where a kind dog-loving station master took charge of him.

But Ayah filled his blue bowl with fresh water every night for many a day after, and set it near my bedroom window, for his little dog-spirit's refreshment; and all the kind little Tibetans quarrelled as to who should keep his chain and collar burnished for him. "For without doubt, Miss Sahib," as Ayah explained, "Wanglo Sahib has gone to be a shadow doggie, only that he might always travel everywhere with the Miss Sahib without giving trouble. Was he not of the caste of us-folk, and sensible? the Chota Wanglo Sahib!"



Bombay Street-arab

